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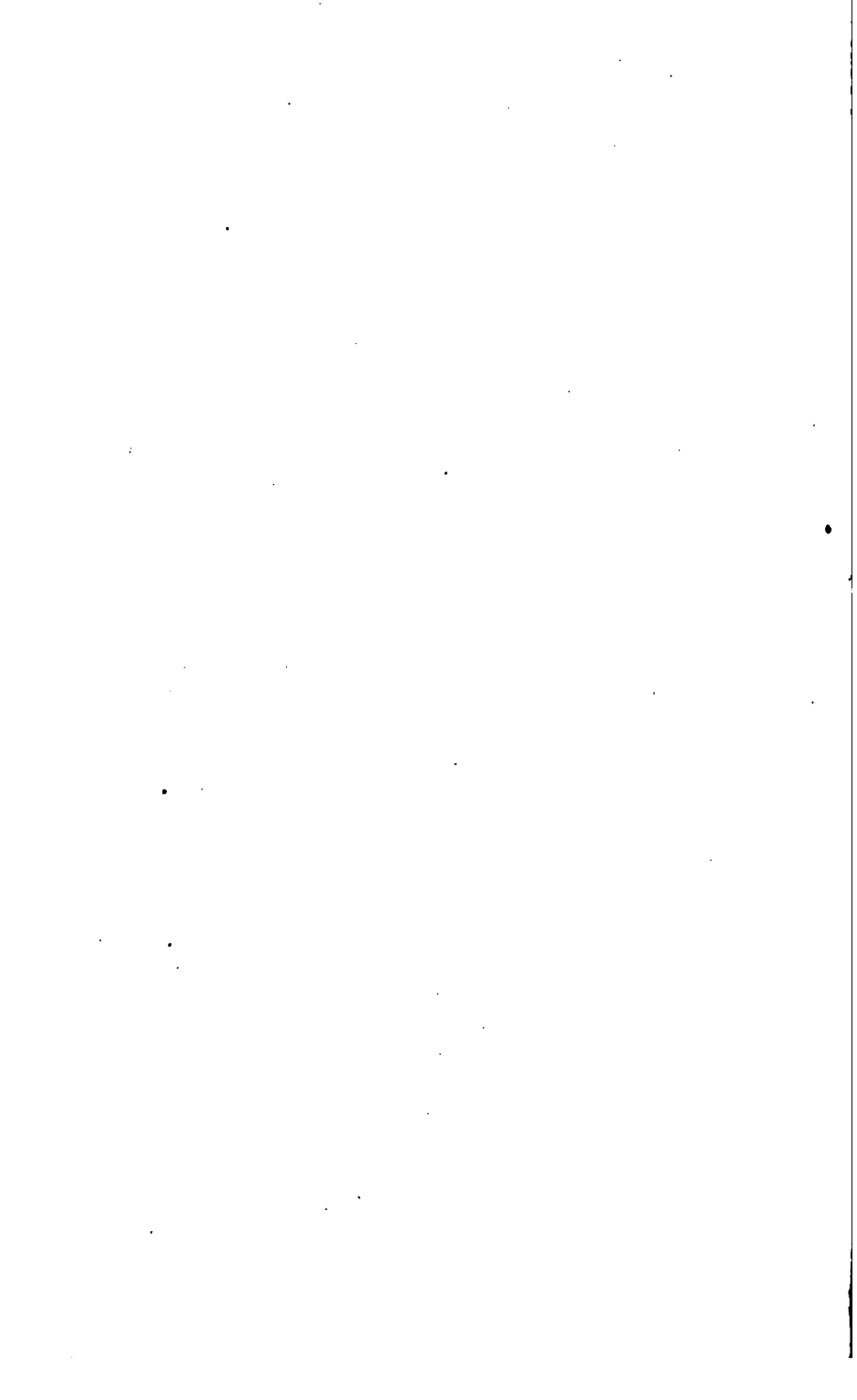
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The Study of Latin and of English Grammar.

REMARKS
OF
GEORGE B. EMERSON.

AT A MEETING OF THE
BOSTON SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION,
OF WHICH HE WAS THEN PRESIDENT,

HELD
FEBRUARY 21, 1867.

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R E M A R K S .



I HAVE been instructed by the directors, agreeably to the second article in the By-laws of the Association, which requires them to prepare for the opening of a subject by an essay or address, to offer something in writing upon one part, hitherto scarcely touched upon, of the subject of education which has so long occupied your attention. I would therefore respectfully present a few remarks upon the teaching of grammar, more particularly the grammar of the Latin language.

In doing this I desire not to be misunderstood. I always have been, and I am, an advocate for the study of the Latin language, whenever, from the circumstances of the learner, there is time for it; and I advocate the study as the best means that I know of obtaining a thorough acquaintance with the English language. I object to what I think the unnatural and unphilosophical manner in which the Latin language is too often taught. And I am

not alone. It is a very general opinion amongst those who are most interested in classical instruction, that a great deal too much time is devoted to the Latin grammar, especially at the beginning of the learner's course. Nearly all those who, for the last fifty years, have studied Latin, have come to this conclusion. I have no doubt that the foundation of this opinion is the fact that very much of the time which should be given to the language is now given to the grammar.

Every teacher must be a teacher of language. In this country, the English language is, on nearly every subject, the only means of communication between the mind of the teacher and the mind of the learner. The teacher cannot communicate a new thought, hardly a new fact, without teaching a new word, or a new meaning of a word already known. Upon most subjects, words are the instruments which the mind uses in its own thoughts.

Language is thus, of necessity, a most important study to every one, during all the early part of life. It is begun in the nursery. The child is all the time studying language. His progress in knowledge of whatever he sees, feels, hears, or in

any way perceives, and in thoughts and conclusions of every kind, is measured by his progress in language. The capacity of a teacher, as a teacher, is measured by his power of using language, clearly and naturally, in describing or making known and felt whatever he has to communicate.

Every teacher, therefore, whatever else he teaches, must be a teacher of language. The most accomplished is he who has the largest vocabulary of words which he knows how to use, correctly and forcibly, and with feeling and taste, upon any subject which comes up.

The proper use of the words which represent or describe things and the properties and qualities of the things which are recognized by the senses, must be taught in the presence of the things themselves. Hence the inestimable value of object lessons properly managed.

Most of these words, however, must be learnt out of school, in the parlor, nursery and kitchen, in the garden, stable and barn-yard, in the fields, in the woods, on the hills, by the streams, in the roads and streets, in the mills, shops, and warehouses.

Hence the vast advantage and blessing to a child,—how little appreciated!—of spending all the earliest part of his life in the country, in the midst of God's works; that he may begin to learn to know, in the places where they are found, the creatures of which the Creator has made him lord, and, while doing this, may enjoy, for hours every day, the air, sunshine and vigorous exercise, which are the best foundation for perfect health of spirit and mind, as well as of body.

At home must be learnt not only the names and uses of objects, but that best part of the language which expresses the affections, duties and relations of home.

The most difficult part of language remains,—that part which we use in our *speculations* upon virtues and vices, upon all good and all bad moral qualities, upon whatever concerns character and manners, upon justice, equity and law, and that great inner world of mental and spiritual realities, thoughts, feelings, fancies, aspirations—what we call philosophy, metaphysics, logic, ethics, theology, politics,—in one word, those higher and abstract relations of which we can hardly even speak but

in words borrowed from the classical languages of the Old World. How shall we best learn, how best teach, the correct use of the words in this part of our language? Is there any better way than by the study of the Latin language? Almost all these hard words,— the dictionary words,— are derived from the Latin, not only for the English language, but for the French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. Can there be a better or shorter and more economical way of learning all these words in their roots, than by the study of the language from which they are derived?

But, for this purpose, we want as much as possible of the Latin language and as little as possible of the grammar. The variations of the nouns, adjectives, and verbs, the declensions, conjugations and inflections, must be thoroughly learned as they are needed, always with the meaning. So learned, they are the best possible lessons in spelling. The child who learns that *legebam*, means I was reading, *legebas*, thou wast reading, *legebat*, he was reading, sees that the change of a single letter makes a most important change in the meaning, and he finds that this is true of every change in

every verb and every noun and adjective, and he naturally forms the habit of carefully noting all the changes in all the words he sees; and this habit, with a little practice, makes him attentive to every letter in every word he reads or writes in every language, and thus a good speller. The abstract principles of the philosophy of the language, that is, the definitions and rules, may be postponed indefinitely, most of them, for most persons, forever. No rule, no definition, is intelligible to a child till after he has learned what it means from examples. Nothing, therefore, can be more unnatural, or more unphilosophical and absurd, than committing to memory and pretending to learn abstract propositions in grammar, before the facts in the language, from which they were originally inferred, have been made familiar or even known.

The best possible way of learning a language is the natural way, that in which every child learns his own native language; and he will teach best who makes, in teaching, the nearest approach possible to this natural mode. Let the teacher study and find out how nature does the work. A child

begins with the names of those nearest and dearest. These he repeats a thousand times; next, one by one, the names of things, qualities and actions, continually making experiments upon the words he has learned; and, as soon as he is able to put them together, making sentences out of all of them.

The same thing might be done, in much the same way, in learning Latin. The learner should be led to make sentences, as many as possible, uttered or written, with all the words he has learnt.* Only it is not necessary, of course, to go quite back to the ways of infancy with those who have passed the years of infancy.

The meaning and the use of the words and phrases, that is, the facts of the language, the language itself, should be first learned, and afterwards, if at all, the definitions and the rules, that is, the philosophical principles.

Is there any reason why this method, the natural method, the method of Lord Bacon, which has

* Since this was written, Allen's most excellent Latin Grammar has been published, and D'Arcy Thompson's Ladder to Latin has been put into my hands, showing that this view had occupied the mind of scholars in distant parts of the world.

given new life to almost every other department of human investigation, should not be adopted in learning language which lies at the foundation of all?

By the present mode a child is made to spend months and even years in committing to memory and reviewing sentences which he does not understand, and which he will not understand till months or years after, and which, to him, may be of very little use when understood.

The same amount of study devoted to understanding and enjoying, and then committing to memory the choicest passages from the best Roman writers in poetry and prose, would make a person a good Latinist, and would be of lasting use and a perennial source of pleasure. The hundreds of sentences upon the logic and metaphysics of grammar, now committed to memory, are seldom of any use except to a teacher, are speedily forgotten, and often the memory of the time wasted upon them makes the very thought of Latin grammar hateful.

As enriching the vocabulary, as laying up a store of thought and imagery, something of the

study of Latin, properly pursued, would be helpful and pleasant to every one. The process of translating is one of the best exercise of the judgment and the taste—some people think the very best—that can be devised, and it is perfectly adapted to the mind in childhood and earliest youth. Translating properly—that is, rendering always the Latin words by their corresponding Saxon—is the best means that can be devised of making the learner familiar with this richest and strongest element of the English language, the Saxon element. It is thus that those who have learned Latin best are most distinguished for the habitual use, in conversation and writing, of the Saxon, instead of the Latin or the French element. A poor Latinist, or one who knows nothing of Latin, talks in words of Latin origin. A good one is apt to prefer the racy Saxon English.

It is urged that the study of the abstract principles of the language—the rules—is a valuable exercise in verbal memory. Admitted. But would not the learning of the same amount of choice prose and poetry, passages from Virgil and Horace, Livy and Cæsar, perfectly intelligible, be a still

better discipline of the memory, at the same time that it exercised the understanding and imagination, enlarged the intelligence and stored the memory with wise sentences, rich thoughts and beautiful images?

One of the best Latin scholars of modern times — many think him the best — the great English poet and prose-writer, John Milton, has left us a treatise, "Accidence Commenced Grammar," containing all that he thought necessary for a thorough Latin scholar. As it now stands, printed in large open type, it occupies fifty pages duodecimo. With a page and type similar to those of the common editions of Andrews and Stoddard's Latin Grammar, it would be contained in thirty or thirty-two. Would not that be enough? Do we wish our children to be better Latin scholars than John Milton?

D'Arcy W. Thompson, a man of genius, now living, author of the "Day Dreams of a Schoolmaster," evidently an excellent Hellenist, and probably not less thoroughly acquainted with Latin than with Greek, says, in that most entertaining book, that he will engage to put all the Latin grammar nec-

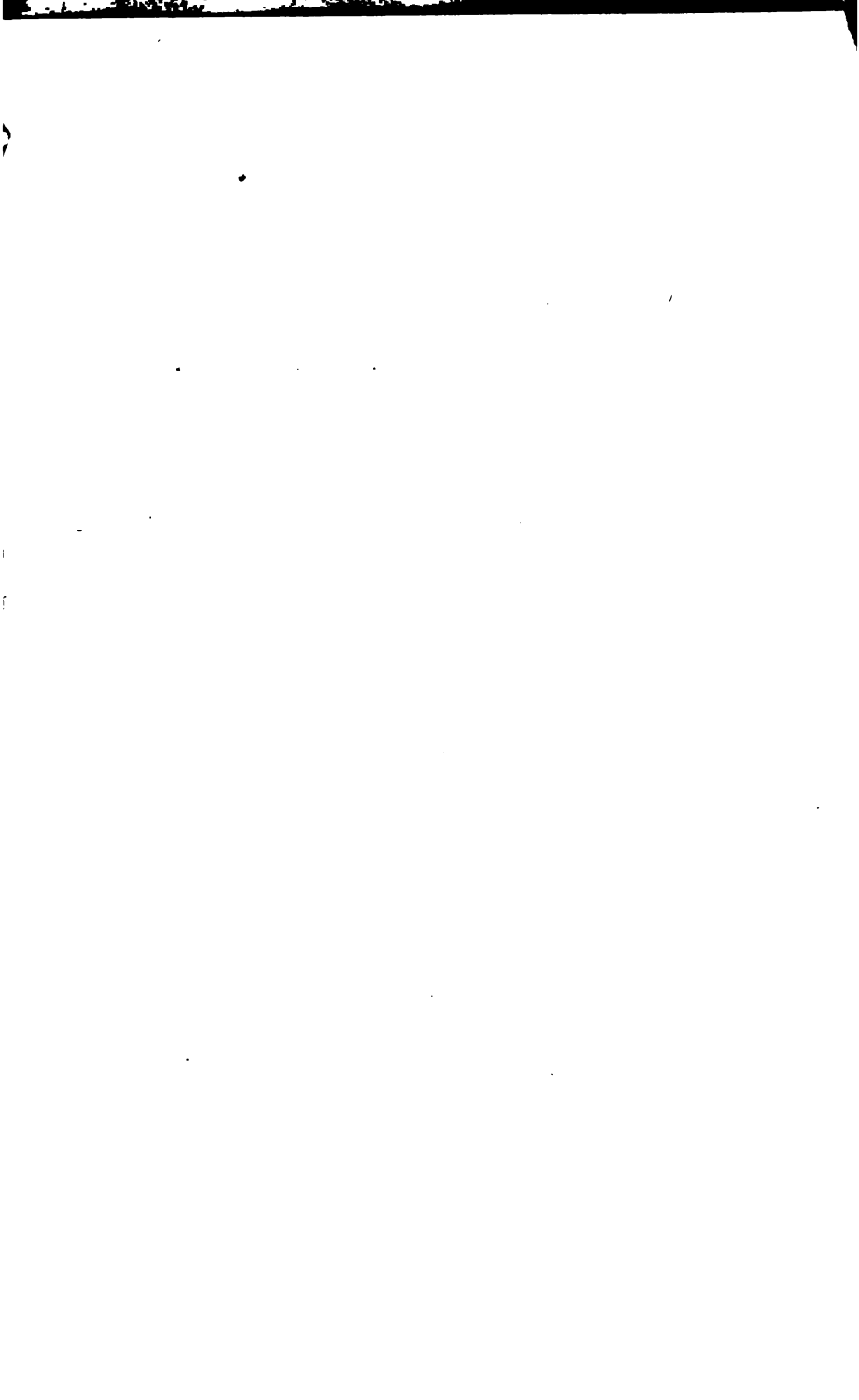
essary to make a good scholar of a boy into twenty-four pages of a little book that shall sell for sixpence.

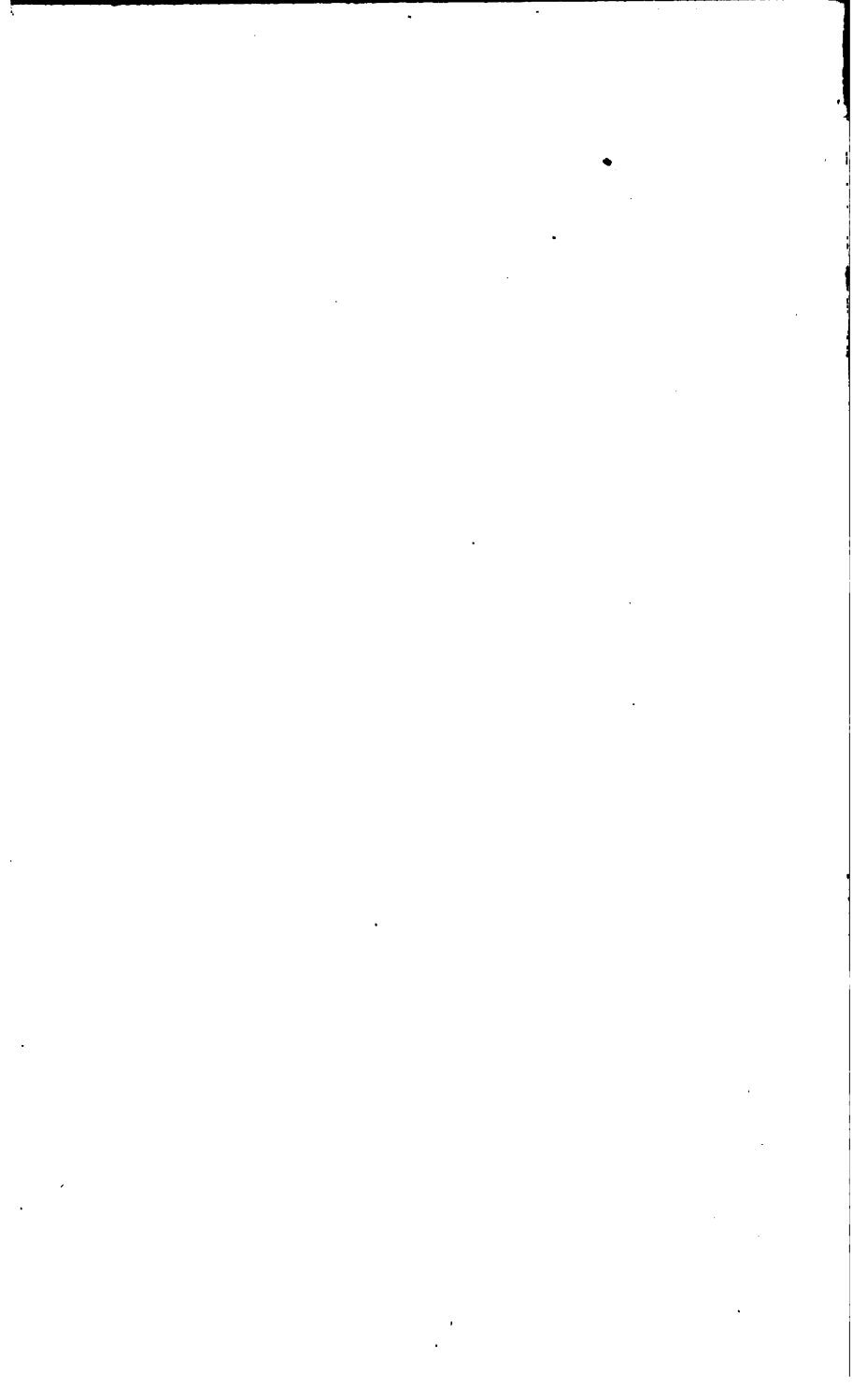
Much of what has been said of the study of the Latin grammar and language will be found, if carefully considered, to apply to the study of the English language and grammar. The definitions and rules are, in many schools, committed to memory before they are or can be understood; and much of the time which most of the children have to learn to speak and write our language correctly — which can only be done by speaking and writing it in sentences made by themselves — is wasted in committing to memory and repeating unintelligible sentences, most of which would be of very little use even if they were understood.

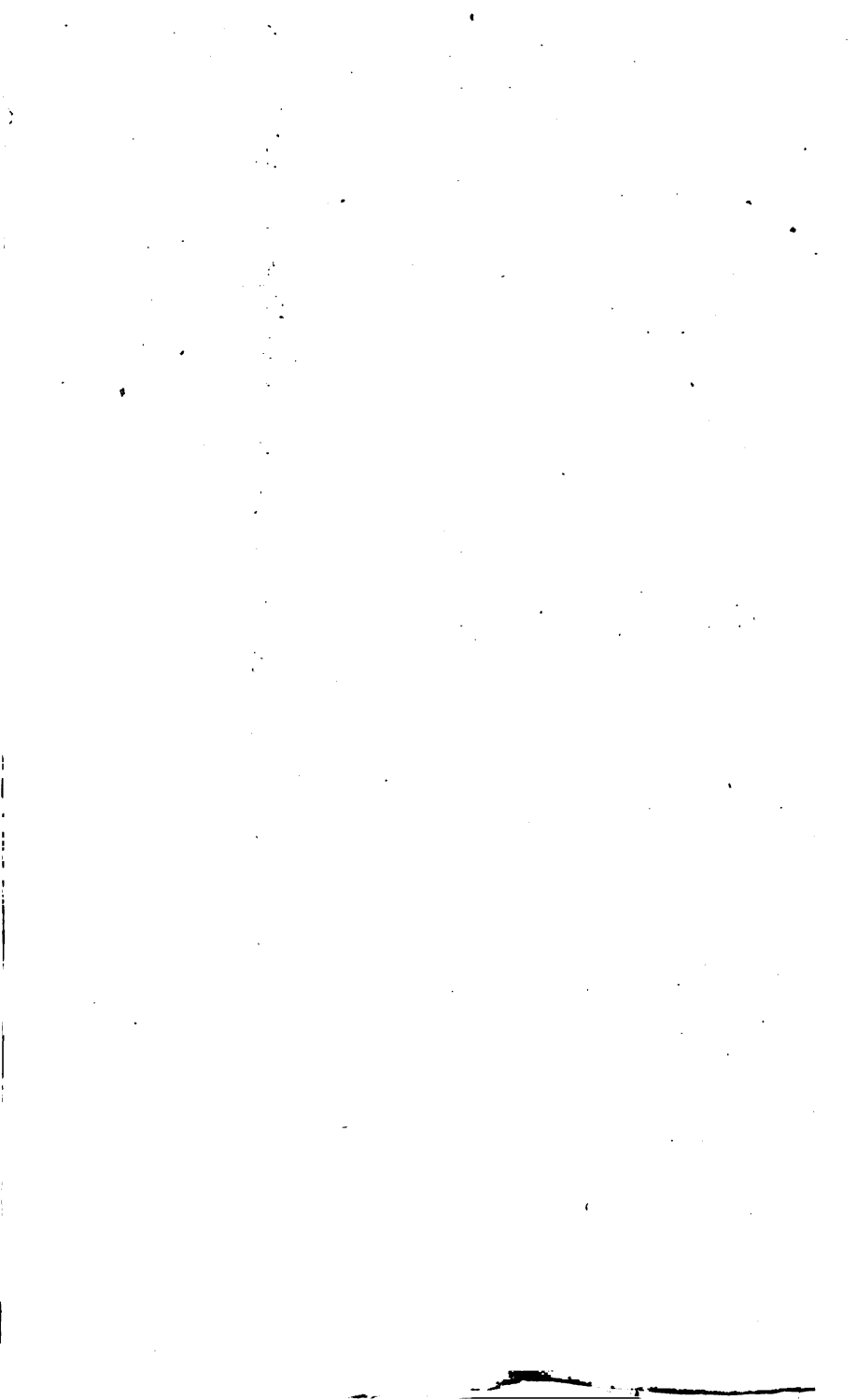
How much more pleasantly and effectually would the memory be exercised by committing the most beautiful pieces of poetry of our language, exquisite lines of Milton, Shakespeare, Pope, Scott, Tennyson, Bryant, Longfellow, Emerson and others, or the rich, racy prose of Lord Bacon, Jeremy Taylor, Addison, Webster, Everett, or, better and more beautiful than all, the Divine words of Jesus Christ.

A great deal of time may be saved, in all our Common Schools, by teaching the English language naturally and properly; by letting the children write sentences of all kinds, first of words suggested to them, and then of words which they may find themselves, thus teaching them at once to spell, to write correctly, and to think for themselves;—instead of wasting their time in spelling words which they do not understand, in parsing by applying unintelligible rules mechanically, and in trying to write themes on subjects of which they have no knowledge and on which they have not learned to think.

The time so saved might be spent in reading in the classes, by way of change from the beautiful literary compilations, which they are sometimes weary of, works on Physiology, and thus learning the wonders of their own bodies and the laws of health; and easy books on the elements of Mechanics and Physics, air, water, light, heat, and their action upon all earthly bodies, knowledge which every person ought to possess, and which most persons will be slow to gain unless they get it at school.

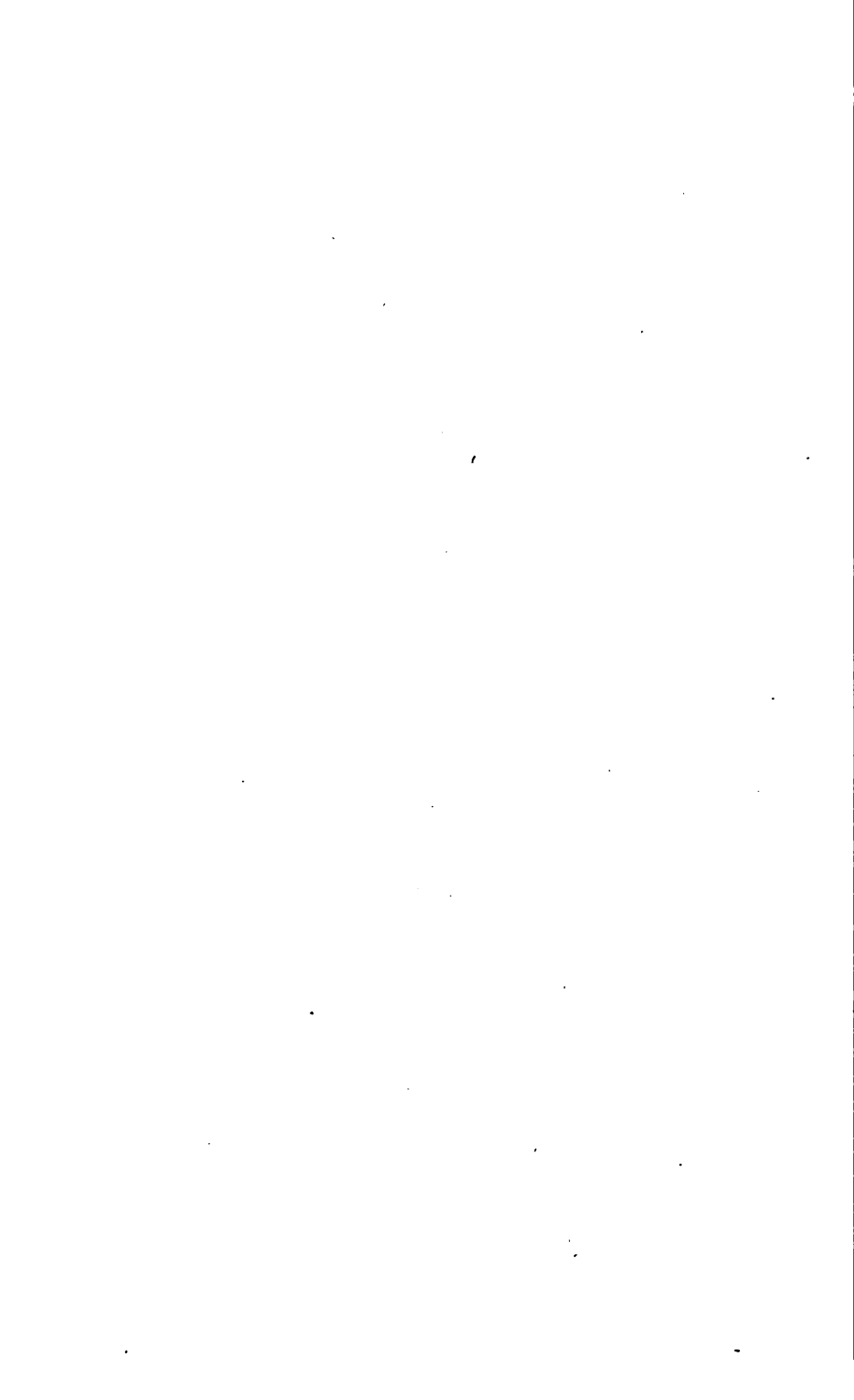








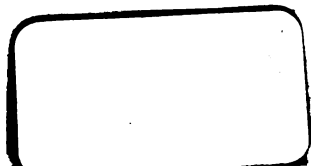




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